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ABSTRACT

Fifty-eight children (mean age 11 years), 22 of whom were diagnosed as learning disabled, were administered a questionnaire in which scenarios were presented involving various ingratiation tactics toward three types of targets (parents, teachers, and peers) and were asked to rate each tactic as to its social desirability. Results indicated that the social desirability of the items were judged similarly by learning and nonlearning disabled children. Both children and adults judged tactics in the context of target or setting and appeared to agree as to the desirability of particular tactics toward particular targets. Tables with statistical data are included. (SBH)

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Children's Social Desirability Judgments about Ingratiation Tactics

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Children's Social Desirability

Judgments about Ingratiation Tactics[1]

There is now a substantial body of data demonstrating that learning disabled (LD) children are held in relatively low esteem by both adults and peers who are acquainted with them (Bruininks, 1978; Bryan, 1974, 1976; Scranton and Ryckman, 1979; Siperstein, Bopp and Bak, 1977). Moreover, there is evidence which suggests that learning disabled youngsters are likely to evoke negative first impressions from others who are entirely unfamiliar with these children's diagnosis, or their personal or social histories (Bryan and Perlmutter, 1979; Bryan and Sherman, 1980; Perlmutter and Bryan, 1980). While the causal factors associated with such devaluations are probably multiple and are currently obscure, there are data that show that LD children can evoke positive first impressions from others unfamiliar with them if they are motivated to do so. Perlmutter and Bryan (1980) found that when LD children were instructed to ingratiate an adult interviewer, college age students unfamiliar with the children judged the LD child who was instructed to ingratiate as more adaptable and less socially hostile than either LD children who had received instructions to act naturally or non-learning disabled (NLD) children who had received either set of instructions. The results of this study, in combination with the failure of Bryan and Sherman to find differences between LD and NLD children's responses to instructions to ingratiate, suggest that LD children may have the rudimentary social skills needed to ingratiate others, but do not use them either because they are not so motivated or because they lack the requisite sophistication about appropriate ingratiation strategies given varying

settings. If such is the case, that is that LD children lack either the motivation or the sophisticated knowledge as to the employment of tactics to ingratiate others, programs involving social remediation might beneficially incorporate treatments designed to alter such "deficits".

In an initial series of studies concerning ingratiation tactics, Bryan, Sonnefeld, and Greenberg (in press) presented LD and NLD children with scenarios in which the child could select from five courses of action. Four types of ingratiation strategy as theorized by Jones (1964) and Jones and Wortman (1973) were used as alternatives. Jones and his colleagues have proposed esentially four major types of ingratiation tactic. One proposed technique involves favor doing (F) by the ingratiator, a tactic wherein the acceptor of the favor may become obliged, perhaps due to the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), to reciprocate the good deed in the future. A second major tactic that might be employed involves self-enhancement (SE), wherein the ingratiator attempts to obtain his goals by convincing the target that he is a worthy and therefore deserving person. The third major technique suggested by Jones and Wortman involves flattery or other-enhancement (OE), presumably a technique in which goals are obtained through the manipulation of the target's positive affect. Finally, the fourth technique involves conformity (C): demonstrations of the similarity between the ingratiator and the target, or attempts to inflate the target's estimate of the similarity. Presumably, insofar as similarity increases interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1974), cooperation might be elicited in obtaining the ingratiator's goals. Additionally, Bryan et al. included another alternative which was deemed a priori and subsequently shown to be considered highly undesirable. Children were asked to indicate which alternative ingratiation tactic they

would select if they were presented with the situation described in the scenario. Bryan et al. found that LD children were more likely to endorse tactics which were judged by college students to be relatively socially undesirable than were the NLD youngsters.

It should be noted, however, that while the children's preferences might reflect their judgments concerning their skills, possibility of success and the like, such differences among the LD and NLD groups might also be attributable to differences among the children in their judgments of the social desirability of the various tactics presented. The present study was thus addressed to determining whether LD children's judgments about the social desirability of various ingratiation tactics differ from those of other children or from those of adults.

Method

Subjects. Fifty-eight children, 22 of whom were diagnosed by their school districts or by the investigators as learning disabled, were drawn from two separate sources, a school district in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and a parochial school located in Chicago, Illinois. Of the participating Ss, 34 were tested in Pennsylvania while 24 were assessed in Illinois. The Pittsburgh sample of LD children consisted of those children who had been defined by their school district as learning disabled. There were a total of 12 children who were so diagnosed. The 22 NLD children in the Pittsburgh sample were selected to match the participating LD children of that area in terms of sex and classroom. Sampling was also such that for each LD child, two NLD children were selected who were closest to the LD youngster in age and intelligence test scores as recorded by the school. In the Illinois sample, children were defined as LD if their reading grade-level reading

score on the Woodcock-Johnson test (Woodcock and Johnson, 1977) was 40% or lower, if they had received low ratings from classroom teachers on their attentiveness and academic performance, and if their IQ test scores on the Peabody test (Dunn, 1959) were 90 or above. Ten LD children were so obtained. The sample of 14 NLD youngsters selected in Illinois were chosen such that the youngster chosen was the one who had an IQ score closest to the LD child, and was in the same classroom and of the same sex as the LD child.

Of the participating children, IQ scores were available for a total of 21 LD and 33 NLD boys. The mean IQ score for the LD group was 103.4 (SD = 12.2), while that of the NLD group was 107.4 (SD = 11.8). The mean age of the LD group was 11.7 years (SD = 3.4), while that of the NLD group was 11.4 (SD = 3.4).

Procedures. Children were administered the identical questionnaire as that used by Bryan, Sonnefeld, and Greenberg (in press) in Studies II and III. Each child was presented with 12 scenarios which depicted a child attempting to gain approval or obtain rewards from a reluctant target. Three types of target were depicted, a teacher, a parent, and a peer, and each target was represented in four items. Within each item, the four ingratiation tactics hypothesized by Jones and Wortman were described, plus a fifth course of action which was presumed to be socially inappropriate and which other studies have shown to be of low social desirability (Bryan, Sonnefeld and Greenberg, in press). The child's task was to rate each alternative in the twelve items as to its social desirability on a four point Lickert scale with a range of very bad to very good. Each child thus completed 60 social desirability ratings. To ensure independence

of responses, children were tested in groups no larger than four.

Results

Each child's judgments of a particular ingratiation tactic for a particular target were summed and divided by 4 (the number of items which involved the target). Thus, the mean social desirability rating per target per tactic served as the dependent variable. Thus, a child's social desirability judgments per tactic per target could range from 1 to 4. The direction of the scoring was such that the higher the score, the more socially desirable the alternative was judged.

A 2 x 2 x 3 x 3 x 5 analysis of variance was computed, with two levels of subject sex, two levels of subject group (LD and NLD), three levels of age (2nd and 3rd graders; 4th, 5th and 6th graders; and high school S's), three types of target (parents, peers, and teachers), and five types of ingratiation tactic. The first three variables were between subject variables, the latter two variables were within subject variables.

The results of the analysis yielded one significant main effect and one significant interaction. There was a significant main effect of ingratiation tactic ($F = 72.85$, $df = 4/184$, $p. < .01$). The mean scores associated with each ingratiation tactic, from most favorable to least favorable, were favor doing (2.94), other enhancement (2.73), conformity (2.66), self enhancement (2.57), and inappropriate actions (1.87).

The significant interaction effect, however, also included the variable of tactics, as tactics interacted with target ($F = 10.48$, $df = 8/368$, $p < .01$). Table 1 presents the mean scores involved in this interaction.

Insofar as the subjects who participated in this study completed the same questionnaire as did the adults used by Bryan, Sonnefeld and Greenberg,

it was possible to determine the degree to which adults and children agreed on their opinions regarding ingratiation tactics. Pearson product-moment correlations were computed, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Noteworthy is the fact that items describing inappropriate behaviors were included in the questionnaire for purposes of determining whether learning disabled children perceived them differently than did nondisabled youngsters. All samples viewed these items as very socially undesirable, and their presence in the questionnaire contributes substantially to the magnitude of the correlations of the scale values across groups by extending the range of social desirability ratings. Thus, additional correlations of the values for ingratiation scales were conducted, leaving out the "other" or inappropriate-action scale. The remaining items all describe some action that might be construed as "ingratiating" under some circumstances, and so the range of their social desirability is more restricted, and the correlations based on these scales are smaller.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

Bryan, Sonnefeld, and Greenberg (in press) have found that LD children more than NLD children preferred ingratiation tactics which are generally viewed as less socially desirable than other available alternatives. From their initial study, it was unclear whether such choices by the LD youngsters did not simply reflect their lack of sophistication concerning the social

desirability of various tactics. It would appear clear from the results of this study that LD children do hold views regarding the social desirability of ingratiation tactics which are quite comparable to those held by other children and by adult populations. The correlations of the responses to tactics by target are comparable in magnitude to those reported in other studies involving social desirability ratings (Edwards, 1970).

The present results, in combination with those presented by Bryan et al., would suggest that there is considerable consensus concerning the social desirability of particular tactics towards particular targets (or within particular settings, since target and setting were confounded). It is quite clear that both adults and children view self-enhancement strategies as particularly desirable ones when, and only when, they are addressed towards parents. Such a tactic is considered more desirable when addressed to a parent as opposed to other targets, is judged by adult subjects as the most desirable tactic available for use with parents, and is judged by children as second only to favor doing as the most desirable tactic. It would seem clear that there is a recognition by young and old alike of the power of evoking parental pride.

Second, there is agreement across samples that favor doing is a particularly appropriate tactic to be employed with peers, and is generally perceived to be of high social desirability across targets. These findings generally support those reported by Matter (1979) and Wood, Weinstein and Parker (1969). Finally, other enhancement and conformity tactics are generally viewed by all groups as quite comparable in desirability, yet are not perceived to be the tactics of choice towards a particular target for more than one sample of judges.

Thus, there is little evidence that LD children are deficient in their awareness of the appropriateness of particular courses of action within particular settings or towards particular targets. If the LD child has sufficient relative sophistication to know the norms surrounding actions by targets, one might well question assumptions concerning this child's deficits concerning general social norms.

A second implication of the present study pertains to reattribution training. A number of recent studies have demonstrated that LD children tend to attribute their deserved success to factors other than themselves (Chapman and Boersma, in press; Fincham and Barling, 1978; Hallahan, Gajar, Cohen, and Traver, 1978; Pearl, Bryan, and Donahue, 1980). This fact has led to the suggestion that reattribution training be conducted wherein the traners, either through modeling, tutorials, or both, increase the child's disposition to self-congratulate (Bryan, 1980). The results of the present study, as well as those reported by Bryan et al., would suggest that to the degree to which such training involves responses within the domain of self-enhancement actions which are public in nature, such training might quite well be rejected both by the child and by viewing audiences, children and adults alike. If such training programs are initiated, then some attention should be paid to discrimination training wherein the child is taught those circumstances where such actions might be viewed as appropriate or inappropriate.

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Footnote

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TABLE 1

Mean of Children's Social Desirability Ratings

of Ingratiation Tactics by Target per Item

	Tactic				
	SE	OE	FAV	CON	O
Target					
Parent	2.89	2.66	3.01	2.56	1.73
Peer	2.59	2.67	3.06	2.62	1.90
Teacher	2.22	2.86	2.74	2.81	1.97

TABLE 2

Intercorrelations of Social Desirability Ratings of Ingratiation Tactics

	LD	Parents	Students	Children (LD & NLD)
NLD	.96	.91	.93	
LD		.89	.89	
Parents			.94	.93
Students				.92

Table 3

Intercorrelations of Social Desirability

Ratings of Ingratiation Tactics

without "Other" (Inappropriate) Items

	LD	Parents	Students	Children (LD & NLD)
NLD	.87	.65	.77	
LD		.59	.65	
Parents			.90	.65
Students				.75